THE DIVIDED WEEK

A framework paper · Poland-Lithuania · Prussia · Habsburg Galicia · Soviet Ukraine

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

A framework paper — why four orders sharing no doctrine, no century and no ruling class arrived at the same instrument; the measurement problem that forces it; the reason the household plot is not a concession but the other half of the same device; the four dials that set what the arrangement costs a household; and the one dial on which the flat version of the argument breaks, which is the dial that decides whether anybody starves

The observation, and why it is not enough

Put four orders side by side and the same shape appears in all of them.

In the Kingdom of Poland the statute of 1520 fixed a minimum of one day a week of labour on the lord's demesne from every peasant holding, and by the seventeenth century the Vistula basin was owing five and six. In Habsburg Galicia a peasant household owed something on the order of a hundred and thirty-three days a year to a private estate, capped by the Austrian reforms of 1772 to 1790 at three days a week and a hundred and fifty-six days a year, and released only by Stadion's patent of April 1848 — with the indemnity payments to the former landowners running until 1898. In Brandenburg-Prussia the same institution stood on the same plain in the same centuries. And in the western oblasts of Soviet Ukraine, a century after the abolition, the average able-bodied collective farmer accumulated 295 labour-days in 1953 and 317 in 1954, which at the prevailing conversion is something like 209 and 225 calendar days of work.

The grandfather owed 133 days to the estate. The grandson worked 225 for the collective. In the same villages.

In each of the four, the household kept a residual allotment it worked in its own time, and in each of the four its members were forbidden by law to leave. Four robes that share nothing — noble liberty, enlightened absolutism, dynastic legitimism, the dictatorship of the proletariat — and one arrangement underneath.

The temptation at this point is to say that the robe is decoration and that underneath every order is men with weapons compelling other men to labour so that a surplus can be taken. The trouble with that sentence is that it is true of every polity that has ever existed, which means it distinguishes nothing and predicts nothing. It is also the exact objection this method has to answer whenever it is put to serious people, and answering it by restating it more forcefully is not an answer.

So this paper is not about the rhyme. It is about what forces the rhyme — the mechanics that produce the divided week in four unrelated places — and about the one point at which the four cases stop being the same thing, which turns out to be the point at which several million people died.

The extractor's problem is a measurement problem

Begin with a man who controls ground and force, wants a surplus, and will not produce it himself. He has three bases available and each is a different way of measuring what he is owed.

He can take a share of the output. This is the obvious instrument and it has one crippling property: he must observe the harvest, and the producer has every reason to make sure he does not. Grain can be cut early, threshed at night, buried in pits, fed to animals, hidden under floors. The extractor's remedy is surveillance, and the price of the remedy is visible in the statute book of the one state that ran this instrument at full scale. On 7 August 1932 the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars decreed that the property of collective farms — including the harvest standing in the fields — was state property, and that taking any of it was punishable by shooting, or in mitigating circumstances by not less than ten years with confiscation of all property, with amnesty prohibited. It is remembered as the law of spikelets because it was applied to people gleaning handfuls of grain left in the stubble. Something like a hundred and three thousand people had been sentenced under it by 15 January 1933, and larger figures are given for later that year. That is what the monitoring bill looks like when it comes due: to tax output you must first make the producer a thief for touching the crop he grew.

He can take a fixed rent in cash. This solves the measurement problem entirely — the sum is the sum — but it requires two things the extractor may not have. The producer must be able to reach a market and convert grain into coin, and there must be a court that will enforce the debt. And in at least one of our four cases the extractor closed that route himself: the Polish lord's monopoly on the production and sale of drink obliged the household to buy its beer and vodka from his tavern and forbade it to bring any from a neighbouring estate, which is a device for recovering whatever cash the household had managed to accumulate. A producer who cannot hold a cash position cannot pay a cash rent. The instrument that maximised the lord's revenue in one column removed an option from another.

Or he can take time. He requires the household to send a body to a muster point, on his ground, on stated days, under his steward. And this is by a wide margin the cheapest of the three to measure, because a man standing in a field is the most observable quantity in an agrarian economy. There is nothing to conceal. There is no harvest to count, no market to reach, no debt to enforce. You look, and either he is there or he is not.

But time is cheap to measure precisely because effort is not, and the extractor gets what he measures. Corvée labour was bad labour and everybody involved knew

it. The Commonwealth's demesne agriculture returned something on the order of three grains harvested per grain sown, which is poor by any standard, and there was no mechanism by which it could improve, because a man working somebody else's field under compulsion has no reason to work it well and every reason to work it slowly.

The Soviet system's attempt to fix this is the best evidence that the problem is structural rather than cultural. The labour-day was not a day. Jobs were graded into seven to nine categories: a job of the lowest category counted as half a labour-day, an average job as one, the operation of heavy machinery as up to four and a half, with additions for good work and deductions for bad. That is an entire apparatus built to smuggle effort-measurement back into a time-based instrument — and it did not work either, because the grader is himself a man who must be watched.

The plot is not a concession; it is the other half of the device

Which brings us to the second instrument, and to the point where the flat reading goes wrong in an interesting direction. The household plot is not a scrap of mercy left over from the extraction. It is the extractor's solution to the half of the problem the divided week cannot solve.

He needs the household to feed itself, because feeding it himself would cost more than it is worth to him, and a household that dies produces nothing next year. And he needs it to feed itself *without supervision*, because supervision is the expense he is trying to avoid. There is exactly one arrangement that achieves this: give the household a residual claim on a piece of ground, and its effort becomes self-monitoring. Nobody has ever had to watch a family weed its own potatoes.

So the divided week is not one instrument. It is a pair, and the two halves are solving opposite problems. On the extractor's ground: time, because time is countable and effort is not. On the household's ground: a residual claim, because effort is automatic and needs no counting at all.

And once you see it that way, the boundary between the two is the extractor's real decision variable — and in these cases it is set by decree, in writing, at a stated ratio.

The Volok reform, made law in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania on 1 April 1557, specified that each *volok* of demesne should be supported by **seven** peasant *voloks*, with the peasant land laid out in three fields and the households moved into a line along a single road. The Soviet model charter of 1935 permitted a household plot, in practice of a quarter to a half hectare. And where individual collective farms were given discretion over their own rules after the decree of 7 March 1956, at least three of them — recorded in the literature as New Life, Red Ploughman and Red Worker — graded the plot against the labour: four-tenths of a hectare to a household where every able-

bodied member worked in the collective, three-tenths where one worked elsewhere, two-tenths where two did, fifteen-hundredths where three or more did, with fulfilment of the labour-day minimum a prerequisite in every case.

Three hundred and seventy-eight years and a revolution separate the two decrees, and both are doing the same arithmetic: how small can the household's own ground be made before the household stops feeding itself.

And we have the effort differential measured, by the state's own statisticians, in one country, in a single year. In 1966 the private sector of Soviet agriculture produced sixty-four per cent of the Union's potatoes, forty-three per cent of its vegetables, forty per cent of its meat, thirty-nine per cent of its milk and sixty-six per cent of its eggs — on slightly more than **three per cent** of the total sown land. Later estimates for the 1960s put the private plots at a quarter to thirty per cent of all agricultural output on under four per cent of the land.

That is not an indictment of collectivisation. It is a measurement of the monitoring problem, in kind, at scale. It is what the gap between supervised time and unsupervised residual claim is worth when both are running side by side in the same villages with the same people and the same weather.

Why the producer cannot simply walk away

The whole construction collapses if the household can leave, and this is where the paper has to engage a real argument in the literature rather than assert one.

Evsey Domar, in 1970, reviving a hypothesis of Kliuchevsky's, put the constraint as a trilemma: free land, free peasants, and a non-working landowning class — any two of the three can exist together, but not all three. Where land is abundant and labour is scarce, a landowner cannot extract rent merely by owning land, because the peasant will go and work land that is unclaimed. To get a surplus he must own not the ground but the man. Domar's own instance was Muscovy, where the state assigned lands to servitors it could not pay in cash and then, as the peasants moved south and east into newly conquered ground, progressively restricted their freedom to move. He noted the same structure in the American South, and one commentator has observed the obvious corollary about the men venturesome enough to run out of the system altogether and set themselves up beyond it, who in the Russian and Polish case became Cossacks.

The argument has been attacked, and honestly. Across countries the predicted correlation between the land-labour ratio and the intensity of serfdom has not reliably appeared, and whether serfdom tightened or loosened in a given place seems to turn on local variables with a different story for each. Robert Brenner's intervention of 1976 made the strongest version of the counter-case: that class structure and class power, not

demographic ratios, determine the outcome — which is why western Europe after the Black Death, facing exactly the factor endowment Domar's model says produces coercion, went the other way. Against that, Klein and Ogilvie's study of Bohemian serf villages in 1757 finds, on village-level data within a single jurisdiction, that the net effect of a higher land-labour ratio was indeed to increase labour coercion.

This collection's own evidence resolves the dispute in a specific and, I think, useful way, because the Commonwealth supplies a controlled comparison inside one state.

At the end of the sixteenth century, under one crown, one body of estate law and one class structure, a peasant with a full holding in Red Ruthenia owed four or five days a week; in Volhynia and the country west of Kyiv, two or three; and on the left bank of the Dnieper and in the Bracław region, no labour at all, money rent only. By the 1640s the whole gradient had ratcheted upward while keeping its shape: five days in Volhynia, one or two on the left bank. Nothing distinguishes those regions except how far a man had to walk before he was beyond reach — of the courts, of the recapture parties, and of anybody's estate.

So factor ratios set the slope and political power sets the level. The gradient across the provinces is Domar's variable operating in plain view, inside a single class structure, at a single date. The upward ratchet of the entire gradient across a century — the statutes of 1496, 1518, 1520 and 1532, each voted by the men who benefited — is Brenner's. Neither reading alone accounts for both facts, and a case that holds the class structure constant while varying the distance to the frontier is the only kind of evidence that can show it.

And in every one of the four orders, the movement law arrives at the moment the labour demand rises. Poland restricted departure to one man per village per year in 1496 and abolished it without the lord's consent in 1532, with no time limit on the right of recapture. The Soviet Union created the internal passport by decree of 27 December 1932 and left collective farmers outside it; the statute of 21 October 1953 confirmed that a rural resident could not be absent from his place of residence for more than thirty days, and even then required a permit from the village soviet; they were admitted to the passport system only by the statute of 28 August 1974, implemented across the later 1970s. As late as 1967 some fifty-eight million rural adults, about thirty-seven per cent of the population of the Union, held no such document.

Four hundred and seventy-eight years apart, in states with nothing in common, the same clause.

The four dials

What the comparison yields is not "the same thing underneath" but a short list of variables that are indifferent to the robe and that between them set what the arrangement actually costs a household.

The days taken. One a week in 1520, three under the Austrian cap, five or six in the Vistula basin, two hundred and twenty-five a year on the collective. This is the number everybody reaches for and it is the least interesting of the four, because it moves within a fairly narrow band in all four cases and is bounded below by what the extractor wants and above by what leaves the household alive.

The residual plot, and whether it is a tenure or an allocation. This is the sharpest of the four and it is the finding the Soviet Ukraine study made. A Galician serf's rustical holding was hereditary tenure: the lord could take it only by a process, and the peasant's claim to it was old enough that even an unsympathetic administration had to acknowledge it. A collective farmer's plot was an allocation. Expulsion from the collective for failing the labour-day minimum removed it altogether, and where a farm exercised the discretion it was given, the plot could be scaled down at an office in proportion to the labour withheld. **The half of the arrangement that keeps a household alive was held, in the twentieth-century version, on the same terms as everything else it held — as an entry, adjustable, with no forum in the way.** That is what a corvée becomes when the party owed the days also controls the register, and it makes the newer instrument stronger than the older one it replaced.

The exit. Real in Poland, where the steppe was a few days' walk and the extraction schedule mapped the distance to it. Real in Galicia, where several million people left for the Americas between 1880 and 1914 and the emigration itself was the peasantry's answer to its arithmetic. Nailed shut in the Soviet case, where — as the Ukraine study puts it — the forest stayed open the entire time and what closed was the far side of it: a man could walk out of his village on any night of fifty years and be nowhere he was permitted to be by morning.

And whether the extractor takes the food into a pool he controls. This one decides everything, and the flat version of the argument cannot see it.

Where the flat version breaks

A corvée takes time and leaves the food where it grew. A procurement quota takes the grain into a central pool. Those are not two versions of one thing, and the difference is not a matter of degree.

Consider what a lord can do to a village by demanding too many days. The household works its own plot in the evenings and on the days it is not owed; the yield on that plot falls; the family is hungry, worse fed than its grandparents, and in a bad year some of the weakest die. That is a real and serious harm and this collection has counted it. But there is a floor under it, and the floor is structural rather than moral: **the grain that fed that household was never in the lord's hands.** It stood in the household's own field, on ground the household held, and no order given at the manor could remove it. The lord's claim was on days.

Now consider what a state can do to a village by setting a quota. The harvest is delivered first to the state at prices the state sets, and what remains is divided. The claim is on the grain itself, and the grain passes through a point the state controls. When the quota exceeds what the village produced, the difference is not an arrears figure. It is the food.

The tell is in the statute book and it is exact. **You do not need a law against gleaning in a corvée economy**, because the ears left in the stubble of a peasant's own field were never the lord's; his title was to Tuesday. In a procurement economy the standing crop is state property before it is cut, and a woman picking up spikelets after the harvest is committing theft of socialist property, punishable by shooting. That single legal difference — dated 7 August 1932 — is the whole distance between hunger and famine, and it follows mechanically from the choice of extraction base rather than from anybody's cruelty.

The Polish and Galician corvée regimes ran for three centuries and never produced anything remotely like 1932–33 or 1946–47. Not because the men running them were gentler; my own study's Module 11 counted three to four thousand executions for witchcraft in manorial and small-town courts, mostly of peasant women, mostly after 1670. They did not produce a famine because they were not, and could not become, the food chain. The Soviet order was the food chain, and the Soviet Ukraine study found that the famine of 1946–47 struck hardest where the apparatus was densest — which is the same finding read from the other end.

So the peasant does end in a structurally identical position under both: divided week, residual plot, bound to place. And he ends there by two different extraction media, and the medium decides whether the arrangement is capable of killing him.

What the robe is actually doing

Which permits an honest answer to the strong form of the original observation.

What is genuinely the same in all four is the position of the man in the field, the instrument used on him, and the reason the instrument is used. Those are not superficial similarities and the convergence is real.

But the robe is not decoration painted on an identical machine, and this is the thing the flat version gets wrong. **The robe selects the extraction medium.**

Poland's robe was noble liberty, and its operative clause was that the crown had no jurisdiction between a lord and his subjects — the renunciation of 1518. That doctrine made the extractor a private man with a private court and no apparatus for pooling anything. He could take days. He could not have taken grain into a central store even if he had wanted to, because there was no central store, no fisc capable of building one, and no administration that reached past his own steward.

The Soviet robe was the abolition of private property, and its operative clause was that the land, the crop and the machinery were all-people's property. That doctrine required the state to hold the harvest, which gave it a pooling apparatus of extraordinary reach — and therefore gave it, as a by-product of its own legitimating principle, the physical capacity to starve a province.

Neither of those robes decided whether there would be extraction. Both decided **who held it and in what medium**, and the medium decided the death toll. That is a considerable amount of work for a robe to be doing, and it is not the claim that robes are lies over an identical floor.

Why history rhymes, stated as mechanics

The last thing to say is why this happens without transmission, because nobody drafting the model charter of 1935 was consulting the Volok reform of 1557, and the resemblance is not a borrowing.

A man who controls ground and force, needs a surplus he will not produce himself, cannot observe output cheaply, cannot allow the producer to starve, and is able to prevent the producer leaving, has three moves available and two of them are expensive. Cross off the output share, which requires an apparatus of surveillance he does not have and a law criminalising the producer's access to his own crop. Cross off the cash rent, which requires a market the producer can reach and a court that will enforce a debt. What is left is time on the extractor's ground, plus a residual plot on the producer's, sized so the household feeds itself and no larger — and a rule against leaving, without which the whole structure is a bid in a labour market the extractor would lose.

That is the divided week, and it is not an ideology or an inheritance. It is what remains after the alternatives have been priced. Position logic claims that rulers in like

positions converge on like solutions because the position poses a problem with only a few good answers; this is as clean an instance of that claim as the collection has, precisely because the four parties share no doctrine, no century and no ruling class, and could not have copied one another.

And the claim is falsifiable in the ordinary way. Where the instrument is absent, the preconditions should be absent too — where labour is abundant relative to land, the extractor does not need to bind anybody, because the market disciplines the tenant for him and he can take a cash rent from whoever bids highest. That is the condition of western Europe after the middle of the fourteenth century and again after the sixteenth, and it is why the same men, holding the same kind of land under the same religion, did not build the same instrument. **The divided week is not what power does. It is what power does when it cannot observe output, cannot use a market, and can close a border.**

Reading this against the framework

First, the divided week is a monitoring solution, and it is a pair of instruments rather than one. Time is taken on the extractor's ground because time is the one thing in an agrarian economy that can be measured at no cost; a residual claim is granted on the household's ground because effort cannot be measured at any cost and a residual claimant needs no supervision. **The boundary between the two halves is the extractor's principal decision variable, and where the record survives it is set by decree at a stated ratio** — one demesne *volok* to seven peasant *voloks* in 1557; a quarter to a half hectare in 1935; four-tenths down to fifteen-hundredths graded against labour supplied after 1956. Read that ratio wherever it can be found, because it is the arrangement's own statement of how much it thinks a household needs.

Second, tenure versus allocation is a separate dial from the size of the plot, and it is the one that changed between the two centuries. A hereditary rustical holding could be taken only by process; an allocated plot could be withdrawn at an office for a failure of labour-days. **When the party owed the days also controls the register of the plot, the subsistence half of the arrangement becomes revocable, and the instrument is strictly stronger than the one it replaced** — which is the reverse of what a century of abolition and revolution was supposed to produce, and is stated here without comment because the arithmetic does not need one.

Third, and this is the paper's principal contribution: the extraction medium, not the extraction rate, decides whether an arrangement is capable of famine. A time-based extraction leaves the food where it grew and therefore has a floor beneath the harm it can do. An output-based extraction pools the food and has no floor. **The**

diagnostic is in the statute book and it is unambiguous: an order that taxes output must criminalise the producer's access to the standing crop, and an order that taxes time never needs to. Where a study finds a gleaning law, it has found an order that has taken the food into its own hands, and it should expect the mortality that follows from that and not from the severity of the demand.

Fourth, on the old dispute: factor ratios set the slope and political power sets the level. The Commonwealth's corvée gradient across its own provinces at a single date, under one crown and one class structure, is Domar's variable in plain view. The upward ratchet of that entire gradient across a century, statute by dated statute, is Brenner's. A case that holds the class structure constant and varies only the distance to the frontier is the only kind that can show both, and this collection now has one.

And fifth, the answer to the flat version. It is true that underneath every one of these orders are armed men compelling unarmed men to produce a surplus, and it is true that each dresses the compulsion in law. But that sentence, taken alone, cannot distinguish a Galician manor from a Soviet oblast, and the distinction between them is several million lives. **The value of the observation is not that the robes are all covering the same thing. It is that the robes are covering the same thing in different media — and that the medium, which the robe selects, is what the accounting turns on.** Anyone who stops at the first half of that has the framework's insight and none of its use.

A note on sources. Two texts are quoted in this collection's Soviet Western Ukraine study rather than paraphrased and both are in the public domain — Marx on labour rent in *Capital* volume three, chapter 47, and Lenin's three conditions of a corvée economy in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899), chapter three — and the reader of this paper should go to that module, which sets out the two texts against the ground they describe and finds the tenure-versus-allocation distinction summarised above. Nothing is quoted in the original here. Verified for this paper and given as the sources give them: Evsey Domar's hypothesis, from "The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis," *Economic History Review / Journal of Economic History* (1970), and the trilemma of free land, free peasants and a non-working landowning class; Robert Brenner's counter-case from *Past & Present* (1976) and the subsequent debate; Klein and Ogilvie's finding on Bohemian serf villages in 1757 that higher land-labour ratios did on net increase labour coercion; the private-sector output figures for 1966 — sixty-four per cent of potatoes, forty-three of vegetables, forty of meat, thirty-nine of milk, sixty-six of eggs, on slightly over three per cent of sown land — from the *Slavic Review* article on the private sector in Soviet agriculture (1969), with the later estimates of a quarter to thirty per cent of total output on under four per cent of land taken from

general reference and treated as approximate; and the decree of 7 August 1932, with the sentencing figure of about a hundred and three thousand by 15 January 1933 and higher figures given for later in that year. Contested and flagged as such: the scale of prosecution and execution under the 1932 decree, on which there is a live apologetic literature disputing the numbers, and this paper's argument does not depend on the magnitude — only on the existence of the clause, which is not disputed by anybody. Also contested: the mortality of 1932–33, given in the sources across a very wide range and not resolved here; the labour-day and corvée figures, which are carried forward from this collection's Soviet Western Ukraine module, where they are given with their own caveats — in particular that the corvée figure counts days owed by a household and the labour-day figure counts units accumulated by an individual and converted at a ratio drawn from a Soviet handbook, so that the orders of magnitude are robust and the precision is not; and the Galician emigration totals, which vary between sources and are given here as an order of magnitude. The Commonwealth corvée gradient is from this collection's Polish-Lithuanian study, which takes it from the *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* and flags it accordingly. This paper makes no claim that rests on a figure it has not seen in a source, and where it argues from an absence — that no Polish or Galician corvée regime produced a famine of the 1932–33 kind — the absence is an inference from the demographic literature on those regions rather than from a source stating it, and is offered as the weaker kind of claim it is.